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GERMAN FOLK-TALES COLLECTED IN CANADA.

I. THE BLACKSMITH AND BEELZEBUB'S IMPS.

ONCE upon a time there lived in a certain town in Alsace a blacksmith who had sold himself to the devil. This devil gave him the power to hold the person who picked nails out of his shoeing-box, sat in a certain chair in his house, or ascended a high pear-tree in his garden. Wishing to obtain some more money, the blacksmith again sold himself, but this time to Beelzebub, the Prince of Devils, who was supposed to be fabulously rich. The blacksmith was to get several thousands of dollars, Beelzebub having the right to claim him, body and soul, at the end of twenty years. When this time had expired, Beelzebub sent one of his imps to claim the blacksmith. The latter asked the imp if he would help him for he was very busy. The imp was willing, so the blacksmith told him to pick the bent horsenails out of his shoeing-box, but as soon as he put his hand into the box, he became powerless and could not move. Then the blacksmith, in great glee, heated a pair of tongs and began to pinch the imp. After torturing him to his heart's content, he released him from the spell, and the imp returned to Beelzebub. Beelzebub then sent another imp, and the other one having related his experience, this one was a little more cautious. When the imp arrived, the blacksmith was just going into the house to eat his dinner, so he invited him to come in also, and told him to sit down while he washed and got ready for dinner. The unsuspecting imp, seeing no other chair in the room, sat down in the magic chair, and thereupon came under the influence of the blacksmith's spell. The blacksmith returned to his shop and heated some irons with which he tormented the unlucky imp more than he did the other; then releasing him from the spell, he sat down and ate his food, confident that Beelzebub would now be willing to let him live in peace. But the fiend, undaunted, sent another imp. The blacksmith had still another method of escape — the high pear-tree. At this particular time the topmost branches bore some large juicy pears. When the imp appeared the blacksmith told him about his pear-tree and the pears that were ripe and which, owing to the fact that he and his apprentice were busy, and also because his wife and daughter were unable to climb to such a height, would spoil if they were not soon picked off the tree. So he asked the imp if he would kindly undertake to pick them for him. The imp, eager to claim this troublesome soul for his master, climbed the tree, but as soon as he was up amidst the branches he became powerless. The blacksmith then called his apprentice and they heated some long iron rods with which they tormented him until they thought he had

enough. Beelzebub could not get another imp to go for the blacksmith, and so he was left in peace.

II. AN ALSATIAN WITCH STORY.

The witches held monthly orgies or festivals. In Alsace the chimneys of houses are very wide, and it was through these they left the house without being seen. At a certain farmhouse there were two women — mother and daughter — who were witches. With them lived an inquisitive young farm-hand. He had noticed that something unusual was taking place in the house every month, so one night he hid in the kitchen and watched. About midnight the women came and stood naked before the fireplace, beneath the chimney, and after anointing themselves with an oil which the Germans call *Hexenfett* (*i. e.* witch's fat), uttered some magic words, and up they went through the chimney. The young man then emerged from his hiding-place, and seeing the vessel containing the oil, he anointed himself to see what effect it would have on him. He had scarcely pronounced the mystic words when he went up the chimney with a suddenness that was surprising, and when he reached the ground he found himself astride a large black sow which carried him with great speed across the country. They soon arrived at a broad and swift-flowing river, but this did not hinder the onward advance of the sow, for it cleared the broad expanse of water at a single bound. The young man looked back, and, admiring its leaping powers, he said to the sow, "That was a long leap you made," but as he spoke the spell was broken, the sow disappeared, and he found himself in a strange country many miles from home.

III. THE DEVIL'S BRIDGE.

There is a curious legend connected with a bridge which spans some tributary of the Rhine forming the boundary between Alsace and Switzerland. When this bridge was being built, an almost insurmountable difficulty arose. Beelzebub, always willing to win a human soul, offered to aid the builders on condition that the first living being that crossed the bridge should be his, and he sent one of his imps to help. The bridge builder, being aware of the extreme gullibility of the fiend, consented, but outwitted him, for as soon as the bridge was completed, he brought a black goat, and placing it before him, pushed it across the bridge. Beelzebub's imp, in his rage at being outwitted, grasped the goat by the horns, and hurled it through the floor of the bridge. Every old Alsatian who comes from this part of Alsace will solemnly aver that the hole is still there, because all efforts at repairing the breach are frustrated by Beelzebub's imps.

IV. STORY OF THE SNAKE KING AS TOLD BY A WOMAN FROM
GERMAN-POLAND.

Snakes are governed, like human beings, by kings. A snake king sways his sceptre over an area of about one hundred square miles. He has a head of pure gold, and his body is steel-blue. Snakes are very loyal to their king, and woe to any one or any thing that should harm him. Once upon a time, a prince of Poland, who had a great greed for gold, found himself in close proximity to the snake king, and in spite of his knowledge of what would happen should he harm the king, he could not resist the temptation to cut off his head, thinking that his swift horse could carry him out of harm's way. But the snakes, by some unknown means, became aware of his act and crowded upon him from all directions and entangled his horse's feet in such a way that it was thrown down, and he would certainly have lost his life, had it not been for his presence of mind in taking the golden head from his pocket and throwing it far from him, when the snakes immediately left him.

I am able to give this tale through the courtesy of Mr. Thomas Ware, of Plattsville, Ont.

V. A FAIRY WIFE OR NIGHTMARE.

(ALSATIAN.)

The gable ends of the Alsatian peasant's log house were covered with boards, and between these were cracks which were sometimes not closed even in the depth of winter, although this part of the hut often was the sleeping apartment of some member of the peasant's family. It was in a room of this sort that a young Alsatian slept. He was visited every night by a beautiful woman — a sort of fairy — who always entered and disappeared through one of the crevices between the boards. As is usual in such cases, the young man fell in love with the beautiful visitant and resolved to secure her for his wife, so he told his father of his determination. His father advised him to have all the cracks between the boards, excepting one, closed, and when the maiden was in the room, he was to take a knife and insert it in the aperture through which she entered. This was done, and one morning the young man was overjoyed to find his beautiful visitor still in his room. They were married and lived together nearly eleven years, and had five children. The man felt confident that his wife would now stay with him, and one day while making some improvements in the house, he removed the knife, and at the same moment his wife vanished and never returned.

Several similar stories are cited by Hartland in his "Science of Fairy Tales." (Pp. 279-282.) He makes the following comment on one particular feature of these stories: "In the Nightmare type, of the Swan Maiden group of stories, the wife cannot herself take the wooden stopper out of the hole through which she entered; but, directly it is removed by another, she vanishes."

W. F. Wintenberg.

TORONTO, CAN.